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"Leaning over the grassy Mound, she gazed
on the name that she had so often looked
upon."

See page 100

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THE
ORPHAN'S CHOICE:

A TALE.

BY ELIZA * * * *,

AUTHOR OF "THE COUSINS," "THE WAY OF PEACE," &c.

Earth will forsake;—oh! happy to have given
The unbroken heart's first fragrance unto heaven

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THE ORPHAN'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

“ Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

AT a little distance from a small and retired village, a few miles southward of a large manufacturing town in one of the midland counties, there was, ten years ago, a narrow and grassy lane, across which the ancient oak-trees had met so nearly, that they formed a long and natural bower. Its smooth, green pathway was rarely trod by any, except two persons who inhabited a small white-washed cottage, built in the seclusion of the lane. It was almost hid amongst the profusion of jessamines and

honeysuckles which clung to its walls, and curtained the diamond panes of its windows, as though they sought to conceal the lowly dwelling from the stranger's eye, by covering it with their own simple beauty; while flowers, such as cottage gardens produce, were glowing in all the brilliance of their various colours at the front of the house.

One evening, when the autumn sun was sinking behind the old oaks, and casting its shadowy radiance through their leaves upon the cottage, a young girl stood at one of the small casements, which was half opened, so as to admit the tendrils of woodbine which crept over it. She seemed about fourteen, though an air of thought, somewhat at variance with the youthfulness of her appearance, might have suggested the idea that she was older. She was very pale; and it seemed as if grief were already acquainting itself with her, for her eyelashes were moistened with tears, and her

cheek wore the traces of weeping. She did not speak, but gazed mournfully on the departing sun, as if it suggested some sad and painful thoughts, while her eyes filled ever and anon with tears, notwithstanding her endeavours to repress them.

The young mourner stood at the window a long time, till the sun entirely receded from her gaze; and the twilight of a September evening succeeded the crimson glow of his parting rays; and her thoughts becoming more and more sorrowful, her tears were no longer restrained, but fell like rain-drops on the clustering leaves, which, gently agitated by the mild breeze, played unheeded around her. There seemed to be no violence in her grief: it was like the calm deep sorrow of maturer years, rather than the bitter but evanescent trouble which belongs to early youth; it was the noiseless affliction that weighs down the soul, and refuses to be comforted, rather than the keen anguish

which vents itself in words, and is forgotten.

She was interrupted in her melancholy solitude by the entrance of an elderly female, apparently a domestic, who addressed her by the name of Miss Marian, and told her she was sent by her mamma, with a request that she would come to her immediately. In obedience to this summons, Marian dried her tears, and endeavouring to regain composure, she quitted the room, and descended into the little parlour where her mother was seated.

It was a small and pleasant room, furnished with a taste and elegance not promised by the exterior of the cottage, which was simple and unadorned, except by the luxuriant beauty in which the hand of nature had clothed it. A cheerful fire was blazing in the grate, and near to it, half reclining on a couch, and looking pale and ill, was a lady, still young, though the bloom and the health of youth were gone. She looked

up anxiously to the door when Marian opened it, and languidly smiled as she entered, at the same time extending her weak and emaciated hand. Her daughter hastily advanced, and taking the offered hand, kissed it with passionate affection; while, her assumed composure forsaking her, she threw herself on her knees by the side of her mother, and wept with convulsive violence. The tears were also glistening in the eyes of the invalid, but she raised Marian from the floor, and seating her on the couch, folded her arms round her, and entreated her to be comforted.

"Oh, mamma!" said Marian, "how can you speak to me of comfort, when you have been telling me that I must lose you? How can I be happy, if you are taken from me?"

And notwithstanding her mother's attempts at consolation, Marian continued to weep, while the soothing words of comfort which Mrs. Ormiston addressed to her,

only increased her sorrow, by the idea that very soon the voice whose sound had ever been as music to her affectionate heart, would be heard no more, and, except in her sorrowful thoughts, that kind and beloved parent would have no existence; for Marian had not learned to think of the life which is beyond the grave. Nor was Mrs. Ormiston surprised at her tears. Until this evening, Marian had never suffered it to enter into her thoughts that her mother's would be a "sickness unto death;" and she had only heard of the hopelessness of the disease by accident, for Mrs. Ormiston, with perhaps blameable tenderness, had concealed the distressing truth from her.

On this afternoon, Mr. Claverton, the clergyman of their little village, had paid one of his accustomed visits to Mrs. Ormiston, during the time that Marian, in compliance with her mother's wish, was taking a solitary walk in the fields. On

her return, she found the spirits of the invalid much depressed; and learning who had been at the cottage while she was absent, she exclaimed, as she observed with sorrow her mother's pallid face and tearful eye, "I wish Mr. Claverton would never come here, mamma; you are always so sad after he is gone!"

" You mistake the cause from which my sadness proceeds," answered Mrs. Ormiston: " it is not Mr. Claverton, but my own thoughts and feelings that depress me. He is my most valuable friend, Marian: he has benefitted me more—oh! how much more, than all the medical advisers whom your anxiety, my child, has induced me to consult; for he has taught me that which cannot indeed preserve my body, but which will save my soul from eternal death."

Marian supposed her mother was alluding to the religious instructions of Mr. Claverton, but she did not quite understand what Mrs. Ormiston had said; so

she remained silent for several minutes. At length she approached her mamma, and seating herself at the foot of the couch, she observed: "I had such a sweet walk this afternoon, and so many pleasant thoughts came into my mind as I strolled along the green fields, and amused myself by gathering a nosegay of wild flowers! This rose, look, dear mamma, I had so much trouble in obtaining it, for the thorns pierced through my gloves, and hurt my fingers, but at last I plucked it from the tree; and I said to myself, "This is just like mamma and me: we have had a many troubles, and she has long been very ill, but she will soon recover, and in spite of the thorns, we shall obtain the rose of happiness at last."

Mrs. Ormiston smiled mournfully, and desired her to repeat some more of her pleasant thoughts. Delighted to think that she amused her mother, Marian continued, with a cheerful smile: "Oh! dear mamma,

I cannot tell you all the happy things I pictured to myself, but I anticipated the time when you would be well enough to pay your promised visit to my aunt in London; and I tried to fancy the gay scenes and the pleasures you have told me of; and I was even so light-hearted as to dance a few steps along the green sward, while thinking of the first ball I should attend. The sky was so bright and glorious—not cloudless, but more beautiful for the beds of snow which were reposing on its azure—and the whole earth was so green and joyous, that my heart bounded with hope and gladness, and I exclaimed, as I walked along, ‘Oh, what a happy world I live in!’”

“Shall you always think so?” said Mrs. Ormiston.

“Why not, dear mamma?” replied Marian: “if I am so happy in the anticipation of the future, surely I shall be much more so when its pleasures arrive! I have

heard people say that this is a world of trouble, but I think I shall find it very different; and if I must have sorrows, I shall say as I have heard you, mamma, ‘*My mind to me a kingdom is:*’ I shall want nothing to make me happy, for I shall seek for pleasures apart from the world, in my own thoughts, and feelings, and pursuits. Mine is naturally such a gay and happy heart, dear mamma, that trouble will never take away its cheerfulness.”

“ My dear child,” said Mrs. Ormiston, with melancholy tenderness, “ these sanguine hopes will leave you, and how soon, I fear to think. Happiness is not so easily attained; and the world of which you know so little, is not one of fairy brightness, nor will your own young and hopeful feelings be always the same. You will be disappointed, most painfully disappointed, if you rest your hopes on earth; only in heaven, my Marian, will you be happy.

You will find that every thing here is wearying, unsatisfactory, and uncertain; your greatest pleasures will have some alloy, and even the completion of your dearest wishes will too often be attended with ‘vanity and vexation of spirit.’ I am grieved that I, your natural instructor, should have failed to teach you the one only way of happiness; but I trust in God that he will be the guide of your youth, a ‘Father to the fatherless,’ and the orphan’s hope.”

Marian was surprised at this unusual language from one who had been accustomed to speak of the world, of the *gau* world, at least, in terms of lingering attachment and regret; but she attributed her mother’s present thoughts to the depression of her spirits, and again endeavoured to give them a lighter tone. Mrs. Ormiston listened to her lively remarks, but seemed too ill to enter into conversation; and Marian, thinking her mother was in need of some refreshment, at length left the

parlour to desire their only domestic to hasten her preparations for tea.

Before she arrived at the kitchen door, at which the servant was standing, she heard her in conversation with some one, and a sentence caught her ear which suddenly arrested her attention. "Yes," said the woman, in a subdued tone, "my poor mistress is indeed very ill!"

A question was asked by another voice, which Marian could not distinctly hear, to which Susan replied: "Oh no, poor thing! she knows nothing of the danger, and her mamma will not suffer her to be told; but the doctor, who was here this morning, says there is no hope for her."

These words fell heavily on the heart of the poor girl, who had become an unintentional listener; and hastily returning to her mother, she revealed to her, by tearful embraces, and half-uttered words, the unexpected, the overwhelming discovery she had made. But as Mrs. Ormiston evidently

participated too much in her daughter's emotion, Marian, kind and considerate even in her greatest distress, summoned Susan to sit by her mamma, while she retired to weep in solitude.

Marian had indeed a misfortune to anticipate, the greatest which could darken the picture of future happiness that her fancy had drawn. Her mother's death would deprive her of her nearest relative and her kindest friend: it would be the greatest loss she could sustain, since she was destitute of any who might supply the place of her parent. She had never known her father, for he died during her infancy; and his relations (as he was a native of Scotland, whom commercial business alone had induced to reside in the sister kingdom) were far distant from her; and taking no interest in her welfare, were of course persons to whom she could not look for either kindness or protection. She would be desolate indeed, without the mo-

ther who had been, for the whole of her life, alike the parent and the companion to her; for she knew no friend on earth, and thought not of the one that was in heaven. But it was not so much anxiety for her own future welfare which occasioned Marian's grief, as the conviction that she must lose her mother; and thinking only of that one most melancholy event, she did not look beyond it to the consequent change in her own situation. One overpowering thought occupied her mind, and filled her heart with a far deeper sorrow than had ever clouded its happiness;—her mother, who had been to her as parents, kindred, and friends;—who had been in childhood an affectionate teacher, and afterwards a most dear companion;—who was the all on earth that Marian had to love;—she knew that her mother was leaving her, and despair, proportioned to her formerly unfearing hope, would not suffer her to listen to the whispering suggestion that Mrs. Or-

miston might yet recover. "My mother! my mother!" she exclaimed, as in her solitude she gave way to each distressing thought, "we must part, but I trust ours will not be a long farewell. My only hope shall be, that the coming of death, which is now so dreaded, will soon re-unite us in another and an unknown world, but a *happy* one, if my mother is there!"

But when Marian uttered these words, she knew not what she asked; she knew nothing of the nature of the eternal world into which she desired to enter, and nothing of her own unfitness to stand before the judgment-throne of God.

CHAPTER II.

“ What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? ”

“ I HAVE sent for you, Marian,” said Mrs. Ormiston, when the violence of her daughter’s grief had subsided, and she could listen with something like composure to her conversation, “ I have sent for you in order to inform you of those circumstances which it is necessary that you should know, but which I may not be able to acquaint you with if I defer it till a future time. I need not tell you that it is long since I mingled with the world, as you recollect, that even before my ill health induced me to reside in this secluded village, I had relinquished almost all society, and devoted myself to your instruction, my beloved and

dutiful daughter; but you do not know that it was inclination, and not necessity, which occasioned my retirement, for your father left an affluent fortune, which will descend, increased rather than diminished, to you. But after the death of that dear father, whom it was never your happiness to know, the pleasures and the amusements of the world became wearisome and uninteresting; even painful, for they reminded me of him who was once my companion in them. The people of the world were still less durable, for they could not participate in my sorrow, and came round me with smiles and gaiety, as if *they* could soothe a breaking heart. I gave up all society, therefore, since he who had made life pleasant to me was gone for ever, and I sought for consolation, if not happiness, in the care of *his* child, all that I now loved upon earth. How well you have repaid my solicitude, how great a blessing I have found in you, it may be con-

soling for you to think, when I am in the grave; for you have been to me the best, the kindest daughter that ever comforted a widow's heart, and returned a mother's cares!

" It is on your account only, my child, that I have a wish to live; you alone attach me to this world, for I know that I have, through mercy unmerited, a sure inheritance in heaven—a mansion in my Father's house. But, through my own ignorance, I have neglected to inculcate in your mind the principles which only can guide you safely through a dangerous and an untried world. I have educated you in ignorance of the mercy of God, which alone is our hope;—I have not told you of the grace of God, which alone is our strength;—I have taught you the useful knowledge and the trifling accomplishments which fit you for the world; but you know nothing of the religion which must prepare you for eternity. Oh ! my

Marian, how have I neglected my duty!—how imperfect a teacher have I been to you!

"It is now some months since I promised my sister, your aunt Ashford, that in the event of my death you should reside under her protection, if it should be found agreeable to your own wishes, which we neither of us doubted; but if, on the contrary, you preferred another guardian, under whose care we could place you without fear, you were to be indulged. Since this promise was made, I have often repented of my engagement, for I have learned to look upon every thing in a new light, and to give up some of my oldest opinions and most deeply-rooted prejudices. The worldly advantages which you might derive from a residence with your aunt, are as nothing when compared to the evils which might occur to you from the utter neglect of religion, to which you would be accustomed; and vainly, but most

earnestly, do I wish I could recall my too hasty promise. I am aware that you would willingly comply with my wishes, and refuse to be placed under your aunt's care; but this would be unjust, since it was agreed that your own *unbiassed* inclination should be your guide. But if, after a short residence with your aunt, you feel unwilling to remain her constant companion, *then*, Marian, remember what your mother most desired, and choose the guardian whom she would have chosen."

"Dear mamma," said Marian, with a sad kind of fondness, "every wish of yours shall be a rule for me."

"You will find nothing unpleasant at your aunt's," continued Mrs. Ormiston: "I doubt not that she will treat you with kindness and affection; but my care for you is chiefly that you may become a child of God, and a believer in Christ. Religion, true and spiritual religion, is unknown in my sister's family; and it is only religion

with which I wish you to become acquainted. Your mother's most earnest request therefore is, that you may pray constantly, fervently, sincerely; that you may be taught of God the important truths which she so long neglected; and that, if you find it difficult or impossible to act in accordance with the precepts of *the Bible* while at Mr. Ashford's, you will not hesitate to leave your aunt, and to become an inmate in the house of Mr. Claverton."

"Of Mr. Claverton!" repeated Marian, with astonishment.

"Yes, my child," answered Mrs. Ormiston; "he is the only friend to whom I can with confidence recommend you. He is interested in your welfare, and so is his amiable wife, of whom I regret that you know so little; and he has promised to become your watchful and parental guardian, if you should ever require or wish for his protection. And now I will acquaint you with what before I feared to

tell you—that your aunt Ashford will be here next week, and will stay with us —” she paused a moment, and then added; “ perhaps several weeks, but at all events as long as we wish her.”

Marian understood the meaning of these seemingly indefinite words, and was again giving way to her grief, when Mrs. Ormiston gave her the Bible, which had recently been her constant companion, and requested her to read some portion of it aloud, in the hope that by diverting her attention from the immediate subject of her grief, it might be in some degree alleviated.

On the appointed day, Mrs. Ashford arrived at the cottage, evidently expecting to find her sister rapidly hastening to the grave; but Mrs. Ormiston was on that day much better, and availing herself of this temporary amendment, she desired Marian to leave them alone for a short time, and began to speak on the subject of her anxiety. She told Mrs. Ashford of the change

which had taken place in her own mind, and of her wish that Marian might also experience such an alteration of thought, and opinion and character. She gently hinted her fears that a residence with persons who, however amiable they might be, were avowedly lovers of the world, regulating their opinions by its standard, and suffering its rules and customs to supersede the Word of God as their guide, might be an effectual preventive to her obtaining a clear and unprejudiced knowledge of religion, or an abiding and influential sense of it. And she concluded by saying, that though she would not retract the promise given to a kind and dear sister, in whose sincerity and affection she had the most perfect reliance; yet she certainly wished that Marian would choose to reside at Mr. Claverton's, simply because *there* she would be instructed in those things which she now considered as all-important.

There had never existed between Mrs.

Ormiston and her sister that uniting tenderness of feeling which might have been expected in persons so nearly connected with each other; owing, perhaps, in some measure, to the difference of their ages, as Mrs. Ashford was the youngest by several years; and Mrs. Ormiston, educated from home, and married in a very short time after leaving school, was prevented by these circumstances from having so much intercourse as is usual with her sister. They knew but little of each other's disposition, but having always been cordial and affectionate, it was natural that Mrs. Ormiston should think her sister the most proper person to entrust with the care of her daughter; and as Marian was much older than any of Mrs. Ashford's children, and was besides, as the fond mother's heart believed, sensible and well informed beyond her years, she hoped that she would be found a friend and companion to her aunt, while she herself could not fail of deriving

benefit from a residence in Mr. Ashford's family. But soon after she had retired into the country, in the faint hope of recovering her health, a change came over her whole character—her ideas of the world, her hopes and wishes, her thoughts and feelings, all passed away as a dream—the true light shone upon her soul, and she saw the whole plan of happiness which she had formed for her daughter vanish before the important discoveries she was daily making. She saw that *earthly* happiness was but a secondary consideration—that Marian's lot in life was but a trifling concern: *eternity, eternity* was every thing, and the short period of *time* seemed as nothing when compared to it. *Then* she looked back with repentance and regret, on the long years which she had passed in giving to her daughter a polite and a fashionable education—that daughter, who was an immortal being, but whom she had never taught the knowledge which is above

all price—that daughter, whose proficiency in every trivial accomplishment had given her such pleasure, but who knew not the way to heaven !

Only one remedy suggested itself to the anxious and self-condemning mind of Mrs. Ormiston, and even this her own unthinking promise rendered doubtful. But hope, almost amounting to certainty, consoled her by the reflection, that Marian, wishing to act in accordance with her mother's request, would begin to think seriously of religion, and finding that her aunt's house was unfavourable alike to devotional feeling and to really Christian conduct, would choose to reside at the vicarage, where she was assured that neither instruction nor example would be wanting to advance Marian in the knowledge and practice of holiness.

Mrs. Ashford, both in character and opinion, differed widely from her sister. She was affectionate and amiable in her

disposition, but she had neither the unaffected piety nor the sound judgment of Mrs. Ormiston. She was a gay and a weak-minded woman, fond of dress and visiting and amusement, but by no means qualified to become the guardian and adviser of a warm-hearted, inexperienced, and romantic girl. Mrs. Ormiston saw her unfitness for the charge, but her sister's principal faults escaped her notice; and, trusting in the mercy of God, who had been her teacher, and who could also teach her child, she cast all her care upon Him, and resigned her daughter to his will, who had called himself the Father of the fatherless. She died calmly, hopefully, happily; and Marian, losing in her mother the only being whom she loved, felt, in the hopelessness of her heart, what is meant by that word—so expressive of desolation and friendlessness—she knew that she was an *orphan*.

CHAPTER III.

“ Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”

MRS. ASHFORD felt convinced that when Marian had become acquainted with her uncle and her cousins, familiarized to the loss of her mother, and accustomed to the fascinating amusements of London, she would not wish for a moment to return to the dull little village which contained the grave of her parent, and could only bring to her mind melancholy and unpleasing recollections; but considering that Mr. Claverton, from his attention to Mrs. Ormiston, had a claim upon her politeness, she called at the vicarage the morning before her departure, and Marian accompanied her.

The feelings of the bereaved daughter

were more acute than those of her aunt; and the lingering fondness with which she dwelt on the memory of her buried mother, though she knew such thoughts only increased her unhappiness, made it seem more desirable to remain in the village which was dear to her because it reminded her of the departed, than to leave it for a residence in which not a trace of her parent would be found. She thought she would fulfil her mother's promise, by residing for a time with Mrs. Ashford; after which, if Mr. Claverton continued willing to receive her, she would return to the quiet village, and choose the vicarage for her house, where she would have one mournful consolation—she would be near the grave in which her mother (even in death the possessor of all her child's affections) lay at rest; and slept, in Marian's sad and distressing thoughts, the cold and dreamless sleep of death, from which there was no awaking.

On the arrival of Marian and her aunt at the vicarage, Mr. and Mrs. Claverton welcomed them with unaffected cordiality. Mrs. Claverton, to whom Marian was but slightly known, entered into conversation with Mrs. Ashford; and the vicar inviting his younger visitor to the other end of the room, opened a portfolio of very beautiful drawings, and while she was examining them, he asked her, in a low voice, when she was going to London.

"To-morrow morning," was Marian's reply.

"Mrs. Claverton intends to request that your aunt will allow you to pay us a visit in the course of the winter," said the vicar: "do you think you could pass a few weeks pleasantly with us?"

"Oh yes! *happily*," said Marian, thanking him with an expressive look, for at that moment, remembering his kindness to her mother, she was disposed to regard him as her best and dearest friend.

"You must not suffer the new friends you will meet with to supersede us altogether," resumed Mr. Claverton, smiling: "remember, we shall always claim a considerable share of your love, even though you may meet with many who will regard you with affection, and treat you with kindness. Should it happen, however, that you find fewer friends than we hope and expect, be assured that *here* at least we shall ever feel an interest in your welfare, and a sincere and unchanging affection for you."

"I wish that I might remain with you!" exclaimed Marian, endeavouring to restrain the tears with which Mr. Claverton's kindness had filled her eyes.

"We both wish it also," answered he; "but your aunt would think us unjust, and you ungrateful, if you did not pass a few months with her; after which, you know that you will still be at liberty to make choice of a permanent home with us."

Marian assented; and Mr. Claverton then, in a few brief words, admonished her to bear in mind her mother's dying wish, that she might become a religious and an estimable character; and receiving her promise that she would remember, and endeavour to conform herself to it, he turned away, and joined in the conversation of the two ladies. It was with some difficulty that Mrs. Ashford was induced to consent that Marian should leave her for a few weeks in the winter; but perceiving that her niece was herself desirous of it, she at length agreed that she should spend the month of January with Mrs. Claverton.

The journey to London, though not very long, was to Marian a most fatiguing one. She was unhappy: and the future, to which, during her mother's life, she so hopefully looked forward, seemed now to be only a prospect of sorrow and gloom. She felt the sadness of a heart which has nothing to love, nothing to hope for in the

present world, and which knows not how to unite itself in thought to another, and therefore cannot obtain consolation by the anticipation of its happiness. Earth was the boundary of Marian's ideas, and vainly looking there for happiness, while she saw nothing beyond, it became her most sincere, though fruitless wish, that the grave which contained the mother she so much regretted, might also be soon the home of rest in which she should lose the remembrance of all her sorrow.

When they arrived at the end of their journey, Marian was warmly received by her uncle, and then saw, for the first time, the two youngest of her cousins: the others were at school, some miles from London. These little strangers were two boys of five and three years old, dark-eyed, merry-looking children, with such a share of infantile beauty as immediately attracted Marian's observation. Her uncle she had occasionally seen, as he sometimes accom-

panied Mrs. Ashford when she visited her mother; but her acquaintance with him, if it had given her no feeling of dislike, had failed also to awaken one of affection, nor had she any cause to believe that he regarded her with much partiality.

In the course of the first week after their arrival, many visitors called to see Mrs. Ashford, as if to condole with her on the loss of her sister, though the real motive which actuated most of them, was curiosity to see the young stranger who had accompanied her on her return. Amongst the number of the latter was a young lady named Ellesley, a few years older than Marian, whom her aunt presented to her, at the same time expressing a wish that a more lasting friendship than that of mere every-day acquaintances might be formed between them.

Complying, in some degree, with this wish, Marian selected Miss Ellesley from the other young ladies to whom she was

introduced, and for a time returned her advances with equally warm, and much more sincere, professions of friendship; but as she became acquainted with her disposition, and saw her many faults, she grew less solicitous to gain her affection, and gradually withdrew as much as possible from an intimacy with her. This coldness did not however succeed their former violent friendship, before Marian had acquired something of Miss Ellesley's disposition. The young Londoner was a pretty, and an accomplished girl, in the sense which the latter word has universally acquired; but in plainer and more useful knowledge she was decidedly inferior to Marian, whose mother had been careful to give her a sound, if not a showy education. But Miss Ellesley was, unfortunately, vain of her person and her acquirements, and proportionately disposed to envy and dislike any one who attempted to divide with her the praise and the admiration to which she

considered herself entitled. Marian became an object of her jealousy; and as she had insensibly acquired a tendency to the unamiable qualities of Miss Ellesley, there was a species of concealed rivalry carried on between them, unperceived by Mrs. Ashford, but gradually effecting a great change in the disposition of her niece, now deprived of the anxious mother who was so watchful to cherish every good feeling, and to overcome, by reasoning and admonition, each evil passion which she saw in the young mind which it was her chosen and delightful employment to form and to improve.

Mrs. Ashford was uncommonly fond of company, and placed all her happiness in gaiety and amusement. Her house was open to all visitors who were willing to make themselves agreeable, by conforming to her inclinations, retailing petty anecdotes of others, and making one at a quadrille-table occasionally. To all her acquaint-

ances, and all her amusements, Marian was introduced; nor was she proof against their united temptations. The stability of disposition which had given Mrs. Ormiston so many bright hopes, was gradually weakening; the love of the world was stealing into the heart which had felt such a void since the death of its only beloved friend; and Marian was rapidly becoming a mere thoughtless trifler, engaged in one ceaseless round of frivolous amusement, as if the present life had no end; and banishing from her mind every serious thought, as if there were no account of time misspent, or of talents misapplied, to be given at the day when the Son of God shall come to judgment, when the earth shall be moved, and the heavens shall be rolled up as a parched and a withered scroll!

CHAPTER IV.

“Vanity of vanities;—all is vanity.”

THE spacious drawing-room at Mrs. Ashford's was dazzling in its glare of light; fair and smiling faces were round the different card-tables; and gay words and good-humoured raillery were passing round, as each card was dealt to the young and beautiful triflers. Amongst them no laugh was more frequent, no voice more joyous, no eye more sparkling, than that of Marian Ormiston. She was seated next to her eldest cousin, just come home for the holidays; and herself, so lately a novice, was attempting to instruct her in the mysteries of a whist-table: while her own adversary, Miss Ellesley, was taking advantage of her gaiety and carelessness, and playing cau-

tiously and successfully, to the annoyance of Marian's partner, a cross old lady, who had inadvertently been placed amongst a party too young and giddy to attend to her pettish remonstrances.

"Come, Miss Ormiston," said she, when the cards were played, "have the goodness to count our honours. We had the four, and yet have permitted our adversaries to win the odd trick. I positively must change my partner when the game is played."

"I really beg your pardon, Mrs. Clive," answered Marian, with a smile; "but I was so much occupied in teaching Caroline to play;—and you know I told you, before we began, that I was not steady enough for a whist-player."

"Teaching your cousin, indeed!" said Mrs. Clive, still more angrily, "you ought to know, Miss Ormiston, that whist-players may find sufficient occupation in attending to their own game."

"Well, if I may hope for pardon this

time, I will behave better in future," returned Marian, in the same playful tone; and dealing the cards for her partner, "see," said she, archly, as she threw the last on the table, "there is another honour for you."

But the old lady, regarding this frivolous and unsuitable amusement as a more important one than Marian thought it; and when the game was played, and Caroline was rejoicing, with childish glee, at having won, Mrs. Clive gave full indulgence to her anger, and severely reprimanded her young partner for her negligence.

Marian listened to the reproaches of the old lady with submissive gravity; but perceiving that her uncle was disengaged, she prevailed upon him to take her place, and retreating to the other end of the room, she seated herself unnoticed, and fell into a train of thought connected with the little incident which had just occurred.

"Surely," said she, mentally, as she saw the sunken and spectacled eyes of Mrs. Clive again fixed with eagerness on the cards, "surely it is time *she* began to think of something better than such a childish amusement: she cannot be less than seventy; and to lose her temper, because a giddy girl threw a few painted cards on the table in the wrong place! I pity her, that she has no more worthy occupation in which to pass away the brief period that she yet has to live! And then there is Miss Ellesley smiling, and trying to look humble and diffident, though she knows herself the best player at the table. What hypocrisy! All those ladies, too, at my aunt's table, how anxiously they look over their cards! how eagerly they watch for what shall next be played! and all for the pleasure of winning a few paltry pieces of silver, which they can well afford to lose. What a frivolous employment it is, for women who professed to put away childish

things twenty or thirty years ago! What would my *mother* have said to this?"

It was not the first time that her mother had been present in Marian's thoughts during the evening, but a residence of two months with Mrs. Ashford, and a constant intercourse with such society as she met in London, had taught her to conceal, and in part had weakened her sorrow; but this lesson, little to be desired that any should learn, had by no means added to her happiness: it had only instructed her to affect it. The first violence of grief for her mother's death had subsided, but she never thought of her without a feeling of sadness, however gay she might seem before such a thought presented itself. There was nothing in her present engagements which could really console her; for the freshness of this giddy life had worn off, and she was beginning to weary of its enjoyments. "Is this the world," she often asked herself, "which I longed so much to enter?

Are these the pleasures which my foolish heart so throbbed to think of? Silly girl! how much happier was I in our little sequestered cottage, with my mother, my only *real* friend, from whom I have parted for ever!"

While Marian sat in solitude, though so much gaiety was passing before her, she saw a servant enter and deliver a message to her aunt, who seemed surprised, and looking hastily around, at last discovered Marian, and by a glance of her eye summoned her to her side.

"My dear girl," said she, "who do you think has sent his name up, and at this unseasonable hour?—your country friend, Mr. Claverton. Aye," she continued, observing her niece's joy, "go to him, and make the best excuse you can for me: ask him to join us here; but if, as I suppose, he is too precise to do so, fix any day you like for a future visit. And now go, my dear; as you are not playing, nobody will notice your absence."

As Marian, with a light step, and a heart yet lighter, went to welcome Mr. Claverton, she repeated her aunt's words—“if he is too precise to join us;” and she asked herself, why Mrs. Ashford could suppose such a thing; but when she entered the room where she was to find her friend, every other thought vanished in the pleasure that his visit gave to her.

Mr. Claverton informed her that he was going into Kent for a few days, and having only arrived in London an hour ago, and intending to resume his journey early in the morning, he had called to arrange a plan, if possible, for Marian to return with him to the vicarage.

“But I was not to come until January,” said Marian, surprised, but by no means averse to this plan.

“And yesterday was Christmas-day,” said Mr. Claverton; “so that before I return, January will have commenced. But tell me candidly,” he continued, with a penetrating look, “did this little objection

arise from a disinclination to the fulfilment of your promise?"

"Oh no! believe me, no!" answered Marian with earnestness: "only I thought—I was afraid my aunt would not permit me to go before the appointed time."

"Since Mrs. Ashford is engaged," said Mr. Claverton, "I shall commission you to acquaint her with my wish, and I hope that she will consent."

"She told me," observed Marian, "to invite you into the drawing-room, if—if—" she hesitated, and half smiled, but was unwilling to proceed.

"If what?" asked Mr. Claverton, with some curiosity: "pray go on."

"If you were not too precise," said Marian, at last, hoping to hear something which would explain her aunt's meaning.

But Mr. Claverton only smiled, and replied: "Well then, as I am rather fatigued with my journey, I think I shall be 'too precise,' this evening; so I will depute you

to make my compliments to Mrs. Ashford; and remember, I shall expect to find you ready to accompany me next Thursday, the third of January."

"Yes, dear sir," said Marian, "I will persuade my aunt to allow me."

"You must come with a free will, though," said Mr. Claverton, playfully, "or we will not have you."

"I only fear," returned Marian, in the same tone, "I shall stay with you so willingly, that you will find it difficult to prevail on me to return."

The vicar soon left her, and then Marian, with a glad smile and a cheerful face, re-entered the drawing-room, and went up to her aunt.

"Well, my dear, is he gone?" enquired Mrs. Ashford. "And why did he call at this late hour?" was her next question, almost before her niece had time to answer her former one.

Marian explained.

"Oh! so he wants you to return next week, does he? I suppose you must.—I must pass, ma'am," she continued, speaking to one of her visitors.

"Then you allow me to go, dear aunt?" said Marian, after a long pause, during which her aunt had played her cards.

"Why, yes," answered Mrs. Ashford, "as we have promised, I see no remedy; but I am very sorry for you.—The fish for the red aces, if you please, Mrs. Stanley.—It will be very dull for you, Marian, to spend a winter month with the solemn parish priest and his demure little wife; but however, you will enjoy home better when you return to it.—I beg your pardon, ladies," said she, turning to her companions, whose conversation had engrossed her attention, even while she was speaking to her niece, "it really is quite a mistake: I assure you my partner played spadille."

Marian now returned to her former seat, looking forward with eagerness to her an-

ticipated visit, and fancying that the intervening week seemed a very long time to wait, before she should leave such society as that by which she was surrounded, for the intelligent and kind vicar, and his good and sensible wife. She thought too, with much pleasure, of her visit to Mr. and Mrs. Claverton, because they had been the friends of her mother, her comforters in the time of sickness, and her strengtheners in the hour of death. She remembered that her mother had called Mr. Claverton her most valuable friend, and for that reason alone she would have looked up to him with respect; but his kindness to herself, so different in its nature and its manner from the kindness of her less thoughtful friends, had obtained both her gratitude and affection. She regarded him as the best of men—Mrs. Claverton as the most amiable of women; and thus predisposed in their favour, she went on her visit to them, determined that for one month, at least, she would and must be happy.

CHAPTER V.

“ He is not a Jew which is one outwardly.”

MARIAN soon found that their manner of life at Mr. Claverton's was very different from all that she had been accustomed to at her aunt's. Each day was begun and ended by the worship of God, while all its concerns were carried on in His fear. There was nothing gloomy in the vicar and Mrs. Claverton, while yet they neglected all the artificial aids to cheerfulness to which her aunt was continually obliged to resort; and their religion, which Marian knew was their principal care, was less perceptible in their conversation than exemplified in their actions. In Mrs. Claverton Marian found a kind and considerate friend, ever anxious

to promote her enjoyment, and at the same time desirous that her residence with them should be as useful to her as pleasant. She saw, with satisfaction, many tokens of good in Marian's disposition; and if she found cause to regret that much which was evil and injurious had gained a place in her mind, she was not so much disposed to find fault with and blame her, as to instil, imperceptibly, better thoughts and more correct ideas, instead of those which, in dependence on One more powerful, she successfully endeavoured to eradicate.

Her kindness and affection soon obtained gratitude and confidence from Marian, who listened to her occasional admonitions with seriousness and attention, regarding her as the friend and adviser whom her mother had deputed to supply her place. She became Mrs. Claverton's constant companion in her charitable visits to the poor of the little village, who were in need of her attention, as well as of the more spiritual

cares of the vicar; and Marian, now for the first time taught to regulate her benevolence, and to study the best methods of relieving the objects of her compassion, found a new pleasure in devoting some of the gifts of God to the good of her fellow-creatures.

One morning, nearly a fortnight after she had left London, a very heavy fall of snow entirely set aside the idea of taking her usual walk, and she seated herself at Mrs. Claverton's work-table, near a large and cheerful fire, and producing a small book, neatly bound in red morocco, she opened a writing-desk, made a clear new pen, and commenced writing.

"Pray, my dear," said Mrs. Claverton at last, with some curiosity, "may I enquire on what subject you are writing?"

"I am only entering a few memorandums in my diary," answered Marian.

"Your diary!" repeated Mrs. Claverton with surprise: "I was not aware that you

had such a book. Would it be fair to ask permission to look at its contents?"

"Not quite," answered Marian, reddening; but she immediately added, though with a yet deeper blush, "I am wrong to refuse it too, because I ought not to wish to conceal my faults from one who would teach me to amend them; so, if you will promise not to be *very* severe, I will allow you to read it; but you must make every excuse for me, because it was never intended for a second person to peruse."

Mrs. Claverton accordingly took the book, and began to examine it with some interest; while Marian, evidently much embarrassed, made her escape to the piano, unwilling to remain inactive while Mrs. Claverton was thus reading her most secret thoughts.

The diary commenced at the time that Marian went with her aunt to London, and in the beginning her opinions and her guesses at the various characters of the

persons to whom she had been introduced were copiously given; but as she proceeded further in the book, it appeared as if she had tired of her employment, and a mere list of the visits she had paid, with an occasional observation interspersed, was all that she had inserted. Some of the latter entries, however, betrayed many of the writer's thoughts and feelings, and Mrs. Claverton read her short and unconnected sentences with much attention.

"December 2nd."—Marian had written, "Large party at Mrs. Stanley's: aunt and I went. Nothing but cards: am almost tired of them. Miss Ellesley there; begin rather to dislike her; I am sure she is very vain.

"Dec. 9th. A ball at Mr. Ellesley's. Miss E.'s birth-day. She is eighteen, nearly four years older than I. Was disappointed that aunt would not let me have a new dress to go in, and did not enjoy the visit half so much as I should have done with one.

"13th. A small party at Mrs. Hardford's. Uncle told me I sang 'Auld Robin Gray' much better than Miss Ellesley.

"26th. Some visitors at home. Mrs. Clive very cross with me: thought it very foolish. My dear friend Mr. Claverton called to see me, and will take me with him on New Year's Day. Wish the time were come.

"30th. Dined at Mr. Ellesley's with the three Misses Warren. We amused ourselves principally with music. I am sure I play better than Miss Ellesley. Only three days more, and I shall have left London.

"January 5th. Fine frosty day. Walked nearly two miles with Mrs. Claverton to see poor woman: very ill, with three little children. Called at the shop in the village, and bought some warm stuff to make them some frocks.

"6th. Very busy making frocks.

"7th. Finished eldest child's frock.

" 11th. Went again to see poor woman, and took the children's frocks, which fitted them very nicely.

" 12th. Church twice. Mr. Claverton told us we none of us love God naturally. Rather surprised at that: mean to look in the Bible, and see if it is true.

" 13th. Thought a good deal about what Mr. Claverton said yesterday: think I remember my dearest mother used to tell me the same, but I do not quite understand it. It seems very strange, but I shall look in the Bible. My dear mamma, if she were but here to explain it to me!"

This was the last of Marian's observations; and when she saw Mrs. Claverton close the book, she returned to her seat, and endeavouring to hide her embarrassment by a smile, she asked what was her opinion of her diary.

" What an idle and useless life yours was in London!" said Mrs. Claverton, not exactly answering her question.

"Very true," said Marian, with hesitation, "but still I was no worse than every body else with whom I associated."

"That is but a poor excuse," said Mrs. Claverton: "we are not justifiable in neglecting our duty, because others are regardless of theirs."

"But there was no positive harm in this manner of passing my time," returned Marian, half enquiringly.

"Is there no sin in disobeying the injunction of Scripture, 'Redeem the time?'" asked Mrs. Claverton: "and then these little tell-tale remarks," said she, pointing to some which related to Miss Ellesley, "what a censorious and jealous spirit they betray!"

"But you must remember," replied Marian, "that these are my own private thoughts: I strove to prevent them from influencing my conduct."

"That may be," answered Mrs. Claverton; "but the Bible tells us that there are

sins of thought as well as of action. I fear, my dear girl, that amidst all these frivolous amusements, and these attempts to outshine your companions, you forgot your mother's wishes, and found no time to think of religion."

"Indeed, I never forgot it," said Marian, warmly; "and you shall judge if I did not fulfil her request. I never, never omitted my morning and evening prayers, however wearied I might be when I retired to bed. I constantly read the Bible on Sunday evenings, and went regularly to church, not only in the morning, but to afternoon service, though my little cousin Edwin was often my only companion. Do not think, dear Mrs. Claverton, that I would ever neglect a wish of my mother's!"

"But, my dear Marian," answered Mrs. Claverton, kindly, "you do not know that religion consists not in these outward forms, but in a devotion of the *heart* to God, and

in a real love for him, a greater love than you feel for your dearest earthly friend."

"Do you think, then," asked Marian with earnestness, "that I do not love God?"

"Ask your own heart for an answer to that question," replied Mrs. Claverton: "examine what is its favourite and most frequent train of thought—what are its most powerful and influencing passions; and if you find *reigning* there, the love of the world, pride, vanity, or any other sin, you need enquire no further. *They* are not 'the fruits of the Spirit;' *they* are not the proofs of genuine religion; *they* cannot dwell unchecked in the heart of which love to God is the ruling principle."

"I did not think that loving God implied so much," said Marian, thoughtfully: "I shall begin to believe that, as Mr. Claverton said, none can love or please Him."

"Remember *all* that he said," replied Mrs. Claverton; "and remember too, that

it is not only his unsupported opinion, but the doctrine, nay, the very language of Scripture: ‘*They that are in the flesh cannot please God.*’”

“ I recollect,” said Marian; “ and his explanation of the words ‘in the flesh,’ also, though I did not exactly understand it. I fear, if religion comprises so much, that I have indeed neglected it.”

“ It is evident, from this memorial of the past,” said Mrs. Claverton, “ that God has not been in all your thoughts; you have not been desirous of pleasing him, or you would not have thus wasted the time which he gave you to prepare for an eternal world; and you have not considered that you were ever in his presence, and that he read your heart, or you would not have indulged in the feelings which are here registered.”

“ It is true,” answered Marian, “ that I have seldom recollected that God was present with me: I have *not* always acted

with a thought of the all-seeing eye which was over me."

"We are all too frequently forgetful of His incessant observation," rejoined Mrs. Claverton, "though we know that He is in every place, beholding the evil and the good: we suffer this truth to pass from our memory, and act as if he beheld us not. But seen or unseen, the eye is over us, and it is the *eye of God*—an eye that reads our most hidden thoughts, and observes all that we most anxiously conceal from men. How many sins, which escape the notice of our fellow-creatures, and which we ourselves think not of, must be open to his sight, who will hereafter be our Judge!"

"I never thought of this before," said Marian, with much seriousness; "and I think my dear mother must have meant a religion like yours, when she so earnestly expressed that wish—that last and dying wish. Dear Mrs. Claverton," she con-

tinued, almost with tears, “will you teach me to become like you?”

“I will gladly teach you all that I myself know of the doctrines of religion,” answered Mrs. Claverton, “and I will direct you to the only source of all knowledge and holiness; for I trust that our God, who ‘heareth prayer,’ will answer the prayers of your departed mother. But while using the means which he has appointed, you must look to him for an effectual blessing; and if you are really desirous of becoming one of his people, you must pray to him for the grace of his Holy Spirit, to renew, to teach, and to sanctify you.”

“I have always thought myself too young to think much of religion,” said Marian, doubtfully: “will God hear the prayers of such as I am?”

“Fear not, my dear girl,” answered Mrs. Claverton, “you cannot be too young to love Him—you cannot be too young to

obtain his favour: on the contrary, an early resolution to choose Him, and not the world, for your friend, is most acceptable to your merciful and compassionate Saviour. Endeavour to pray to Him, therefore, as you would to a kind father: do not be discouraged at the weakness of your first efforts to serve him, nor at the imperfection of your most sincere prayers; for a sigh, or a tear, if proceeding from a humble heart, speaks a language from which he never turns away."

"My kindest friend, my second mother!" said Marian, embracing Mrs. Claverton with grateful tenderness, "you shall teach me how to love this good Father in heaven; and, through your instruction, I shall learn the way to join my mother, in the world of happiness to which she belongs."

CHAPTER VI.

“ If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

MARIAN soon acquired some knowledge of the religion whose real nature she had till now been totally unacquainted with ; and though, at first, her only motive for requesting to be instructed in it, had been a desire to fulfil her mother's wish, she soon began to love it for its own sake, and to form a somewhat more adequate idea of its everlasting importance. So much was told to her, and she read so much of the goodness of the Redeemer of the world, that a love for him, and a desire to obey his commands, gradually possessed her mind ; and perceiving the evil nature of those feelings and passions in which she had so long indulged, she prayed (imperfectly indeed,

but most sincerely) for the strength which Christ had promised, to enable her to resist and conquer sin; nor were her prayers and endeavours without success. Favoured by God with a mind and an understanding which her mother had studied to improve, and having a sound and competent instructor in Mr. Claverton, Marian soon learned from the scriptures what were the doctrines and precepts of the religion in which she professed to believe, and by the grace of the Divine Spirit whose teaching she implored, she resolved to make those doctrines the articles of her faith, and those precepts the rule of her life.

In consequence of the severe illness of her youngest cousin, Marian's return to London was delayed until the beginning of March, and she did not leave the residence of Mr. Claverton, until a great and a visible change had taken place in her disposition and her character. She had new thoughts, new wishes, new topics of

discourse, new motives of conduct, a new end of being, and a new hope in futurity. She had a real humility of heart, and her former vanity was nearly overcome; her proud and hasty temper was changed, and “a meek and quiet spirit” was becoming habitual to her. Mrs. Ashford soon perceived the alteration, and perhaps might have seen it with pleasure, but that Marian once or twice unthinkingly expressed a preference for a residence at the vicarage; and in answer to her aunt’s interrogations, she frankly confessed, that though she should wish to visit London occasionally, she would rather make her permanent abode at Mr. Claverton’s.

Though Mrs. Ashford was mortified and displeased at Marian’s choice, she was careful to hide these feelings from her niece; and only requested, with much affected mildness, that she would continue in London until the following September, when the first year after her mother’s death would

have expired, and then she could declare and act according to her final decision.

Marian felt that it would seem almost like ingratitude for the past kindness of her aunt, if she refused to spend the intervening months with her; but still it was not without reluctance that she gave up the idea of passing some part, at least, of the summer at Ladyston: she consented, however, and Mrs. Ashford, fully persuaded that she would soon forget her wish to live at the vicarage, suffered the subject to pass from her mind without giving her any further anxiety.

Resolved that her time should not be altogether spent in uselessness, Marian, with her aunt's consent, took her little cousins, Edwin and Charles, from the care of their nurse-maid, who had hitherto been their only instructress; and found, in imparting to them the elements of knowledge, an employment at once pleasant to herself, and beneficial to them.

She had withdrawn herself, as much as possible, from the constant visiting and the frivolous enjoyments in which she had once shared, because, if not sinful, they were at least opposed to her present inclinations, and of a nature too empty and wearying to be mistaken by her for pleasures. But still, ever cheerful and obliging, she never refused to gratify her friends by the practice of those pleasing accomplishments in which Mrs. Ormiston had carefully instructed her; and her musical talents particularly, were frequently called into action by her aunt, when she had no other source of amusement at hand.

It had formerly been principally on Sunday evenings that Marian had been required to play; for Mrs. Ashford always found the Sabbath a dull and lingering day, for which she had no employment; and *custom* having debarred her from her amusements, Marian's instrument was her only resource, and it had become usual

with her to gratify her aunt by long and sometimes fatiguing hours of uninterrupted music. Mrs. Ashford made in reality but little, even external, difference between the days appointed for man, and the one which God had chosen for his own; so that she indulged herself by listening to her favourite songs and overtures at home, though she was unable to hear them in public; but after her visit to Mr. Claverton, Marian became aware of the sin of thus breaking the holiness of the Sabbath, and determined to refuse any future solicitations to act against the express commandment of God.

It happened that several Sundays after Marian's return, Mrs. Ashford was engaged in paying friendly visits to some of her husband's relations, who had lately become inhabitants of the metropolis. They were a degree inferior to Mrs. Ashford in rank, and happy to have so polite and fashionable a relation, they overwhelmed

her with civilities, and prevailed upon her to be their companion at every public place; while she willingly acceded to their wishes, more especially on that day of rest which she found so wearisome.

At length, however, the strangers becoming accustomed to London, and to their gay relative, relaxed in their attentions, and she was thrown back to the dull and spiritless society at home—to the little-valued conversation of her husband, and the unregarded caresses of her children. It was then, in the returning hours of pitiable nervousness and ennui, (for so Mrs. Ashford entitled her sinful indifference towards the duties of the Sabbath,) that she recollect ed Marian's uniform readiness to amuse her, and again requested to hear the enlivening sounds with which she had been accustomed to dispel her gloomy feelings. Marian obeyed, but she selected only sacred music; and her aunt, after listening for some time with great patience,

at length asked her to play something less solemn.

"Let me defer playing my lively tunes until to-morrow, dear aunt," said Marian.

"Oh! never mind," answered Mrs. Ashford, "you are not with the Clavertons; though I really think, Marian, they have given you some of their strict notions."

"You are perhaps right," said Marian, gravely: "at all events, I would rather not play any other than sacred music this evening."

"I certainly will not urge you to do anything against your conscience," said Mrs. Ashford, contemptuously; "so, as I do not choose to hear those droning tunes, you may leave your instrument."

Marian obeyed in silence; but her uncle, who had heard this brief dialogue, interposed: "I really think you are wrong, Harriet," said he, "in desiring Marian to break the sanctity of the Sabbath in this irreverent manner; particularly when the

children are present, with whom example is much more powerful than precept."

"Break the Sabbath!" repeated little Edwin, who had caught the words as familiar to him; "cousin Marian says, only naughty boys do that."

"Really, this is very edifying," said Mrs. Ashford, with evident pique, but struggling to regain her good-humour: "I surely must improve, when I have such a trio of advisers. However, as I have no pretensions to superior sanctity, Marian must excuse me, if I do not profess myself a convert to her newly-acquired opinions. Fanny Ellesley, fortunately for me, has promised to call this evening, and she, perhaps, may not have so scrupulous a conscience."

No one replied to an observation which seemed addressed to no particular individual; and before Marian had recovered from her embarrassment, Miss Ellesley *did* come, and the whole incident, not without

a little exaggeration, was related to her. She willingly acceded to the wish of Mrs. Ashford, not sorry to have an opportunity of displaying her readiness to oblige, in such direct contrast to Marian's firm adherence to her own principles; and Mrs. Ashford, who knew a little of her niece's disposition, endeavoured to mortify her by extravagantly praising the young lady's performance. But the time was past that Marian's temper could be ruffled, or her vanity aroused by any applause which was bestowed upon Miss Ellesley, no longer her rival; for though she had once or twice, since she came to London, felt some return of her old feelings with regard to her, they had been firmly and successfully resisted. She saw that they had different characters, different tastes, and different objects to attain; she regarded Miss Ellesley therefore with no feeling but that of indifference, and on the part of Marian all competition had ceased, and every wish to outshine was relinquished.

But it was not so with Miss Ellesley. Her character was unchanged, her motives were the same; and after she had quitted the instrument, she began, with an affectation of the kindest friendship, to remonstrate with Marian on the inconsistency of those principles which required her, under the semblance of a duty to God, to refuse a compliance with the wishes of her friends, and to deny herself the gratification of obliging them. But Marian, convinced that she was right, and possessed of more good sense, and a better understanding than her adviser, replied to her with a steady firmness, that had the effect of silencing her remonstrances.

At the same time that the young Christian unconsciously displayed the seriousness of her character, and the deep root which these new opinions had taken in her mind; and her aunt, who listened to her with surprise and astonishment, secretly decided that, if Marian retained these

strange ideas, it would be much better that she should leave a family of which no individual was disposed to agree with her, and in which, as it regarded the younger members, her conversation and example might have an effect by no means desirable.

CHAPTER VII.

“ No man can serve two masters.”

IN the course of the following week, two visitors to Mrs. Ashford arrived from the country, for whose coming she had been very desirous, and whom she welcomed with every demonstration of joy. Lady Esdaile was the widow of a wealthy baronet, and her daughter and Mrs. Ashford had been intimate friends at school; an intimacy which had been continued, without any diminution of affection, during the many years which had elapsed since its commencement.

Marian had felt some curiosity to see these ladies, in consequence of Mrs. Ashford's repeated encomiums; but their first

meeting did not give her a favourable impression of the strangers, for Miss Esdaile scarcely spoke at all, and her mother only addressed Marian in the mortifying and unmeaning language which would have suited an ignorant and spoiled child, praising alternately the colour of her eyes, or the freshness of her complexion, by no means aware that Marian's naturally pale cheek owed its unusual glow to her own commendations.

Lady Esdaile, however, was really pleased with Marian's appearance, and expressed her good opinion still more plainly when the subject of her conversation had left the room. Mrs. Ashford assented to her warm commendations, but informed her friends, with a sigh of regret, that the child was ruined, completely ruined, by having already imbibed some of those dangerous evangelical opinions which were becoming so fashionable.

Lady Esdaile admitted that this was an

unfortunate circumstance, but could not think, with Mrs. Ashford, that Miss Ormiston was past hope, because she was such a mere child, that her sentiments could be of but little consequence, as it was impossible that they could be long unchanged.

"I wish you did not mistake my niece's character," said Mrs. Ashford; "but though a child indeed in outward appearance, it requires but little penetration to see that that character is already formed, and it is of too firm and decided a nature to be easily changed. From having been constantly in the society of her mother, and from having no younger companions, she very early laid aside her childish habits, and has now, at fifteen, a stability and a thoughtfulness which few young women possess at twenty."

"You should rather rejoice than complain on this account," said Miss Esdaile, speaking for the first time since Marian left the room.

"And I should rejoice," answered Mrs. Ashford, "if it were not for her strict religious notions. - You have no idea how provoking and annoying her opinions are: not that she ever intrudes them, for she is always as retiring and diffident as you saw her just now; but there is such a tacit reproof to oneself in her scrupulous attention to her duty, and it interferes so with our enjoyments;" and then she related the incident of the preceding Sunday.

"I should have insisted upon her obedience," said Lady Esdaile.

"But how could I?" asked Mrs. Ashford, candidly: "I knew that she was right, and I confess I could not abuse the authority to which my relationship entitles me, so far as to compel her to act as we both knew would be wrong."

Miss Esdaile glanced hastily at her mother, and colouring deeply, rose from her chair and walked to the window; upon which Lady Esdaile, in a low whisper, and

with a look which asked for condolence, informed Mrs. Ashford that her daughter was more than inclined to these evangelical opinions, and was only restrained by the fear of her displeasure, from openly betraying her belief in them.

Mrs. Ashford most sincerely sympathised with Lady Esdaile, when she was informed of this domestic calamity; though at the same time she congratulated her that, though Miss Esdaile had long passed by the days of girlhood, she still retained a submission to her mother's authority, which she knew enough of her friend's disposition to be aware was owing more to affection than to fear.

When Miss Esdaile became aware of Marian's real character, she laid aside the reserve which had before made her so repelling, and respecting the firmness of principle, and the unaffected humility of heart which were equally evident in the conduct of her young acquaintance, she

became anxious to obtain her for a friend, and wished, how vainly wished! that she had the strength of mind, and the decision of character, to imitate her example. Miss Esdaile was deeply convinced of the unspeakable importance of religion, and the insignificance of every thing merely temporal; she knew, too, the only way of salvation—she had mourned and repented for her many sins—she had seen the magnitude of the sacrifice which alone could atone for them—she had rejoiced for a time, “in full assurance” that she was forgiven;—but the peace of God had long since passed from her heart, for that heart was a divided one. She loved her mother too well to give her pain—she could not resist her persuasions and entreaties; and vainly striving to reconcile her duty and her inclinations—to serve at once both “God and Mammon,” she lost every enjoyment of life, whether real or fancied, for the world had no pleasures in her esti-

mation, and she had forfeited the happiness of religion.

In the conduct of Marian Miss Esdaile saw every day a tacit reproof of her own; though Marian was herself perfectly unconscious of the feelings of admiration and self-reproach which she occasioned her. In her mild, obligingness of manner; in her unhesitating compliance with the wishes of others; in her subdued, yet evident and unvarying cheerfulness; in her deep, but unobtrusive feelings of religion; in her simple exemplification of its holiness, and the meek and gentle spirit in which she repelled all attacks upon it; Miss Esdaile saw what *her* conduct ought to be; and her conscience whispered that, with all her advantages, her life should be much more exemplary than that of so young a Christian, and one too whose advantages had been so inferior to her own.

In honour of her visitors, (an attention with which *one* of them could well have

dispensed,) there was one evening a splendid ball at Mrs. Ashford's, at which both Marian and Miss Esdaile were present; the one, because she knew not how to refuse; the other, because she had an indefinite idea that there was something in the spirit of these amusements inconsistent with the frame of mind which she wished to become habitual to her, she had not yet determined whether she ought altogether to withdraw from them, and she was anxious to "prove all things," that she might "hold fast that which is good."

"And this is called pleasure!" mentally exclaimed Marian, as she joined in the sauntering promenade, and suffered her thoughts to wander from the light and frivolous conversation of the two friends by whom she was accompanied: "this gay and childish amusement—these dazzling lights—these splendid dresses—this glitter of jewels, and the foolish and unmeaning compliments I hear, are the enjoyments of

a woman—of an immortal being, made for home, and usefulness, and blessing, but contented with the fancied pleasures of this scene of vanity, and folly, and display!"

And then she thought how differently the evening would have passed at Lady-ston: she contrasted the high and estimable character of Mrs. Claverton—her deep, but cheerful piety—her life of charity and holiness—her unwearying endeavours to benefit others, with those of the giddy triflers who were before her; and she saw how utterly theirs sunk in the scale of excellence. "It is not *here*," she resolved, internally, "that I will come for enjoyment, that I will seek for happiness!"

At length the wearisome hours were gone, and Marian was alone in her chamber. The moon shone brightly through the curtains, and dismissing her attendant, Marian drew aside the drapery which intervened between its silvery rays, and as she

gazed upon the full and shining orb, its soothing and quiet light, the deep and spangled azure sky, and the almost stirless air, infused something of their own calm into her mind. She fell into her favourite train of thought, recalling the happy hours she had spent with her mother at Lady-ston, and the more recent ones she had enjoyed with Mrs. Claverton, second only to that mother in her love; and then she recurred to the so different pleasures of the ball-room, and she acknowledged that they were right who disapproved of the spirit and tendency of such an amusement. So lately as she had learned to think of God, and to take his word for the guide of her youth, she felt that if she wished not to forget him, nor to disobey that divine instructor, she must not accustom herself to such scenes as that she had just left. It was but a small sacrifice to give up such pleasures, and had it been a greater, she was not of a disposition so wavering and

undecided, as to hesitate in the fulfilment of a duty; therefore she resolved to come out from the world, to shun its dangerous enticements, and to separate herself from sinners; in the assurance that He, "faithful that promised," the Lord God Almighty, would be a Father to her, and receive her as his child. "'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,' shall be the warning voice to keep my heart from wandering," said Marian; "and may the grace of God, which is given to the weak, assist me in keeping resolutions which, without that grace, must be broken!"

And then, in the spirit of humble, but trusting confidence, Marian knelt, and fulfilled her evening duty of prayer and thanksgiving; sinking at last into a peaceful and undisturbed slumber, which visited the eyelids of but few who, like her, had joined in the vain but fascinating diversions of the night.

"And what did you think of the ball?" enquired Miss Esdaile, the first time she was alone with Marian.

"I do not think it a consistent amusement for one who professes religion," answered Marian, to whom Miss Esdaile's real character was unknown.

"And if you were this morning to receive an invitation to another, how should you act?"

"I should certainly decline it," said Marian, unhesitatingly.

"But think of the ridicule to which this answer would expose you, and of the probable displeasure of your aunt."

"My motives of conduct teach me to despise ridicule," replied Marian, "not to be influenced by the fear of it; and though I love my aunt, and would not willingly offend her, I dare not for that reason offend my God."

"And will you then, at your age, just the age when these amusements become

most fascinating, will you voluntarily relinquish them all?"

"It is my duty to do so," replied Marian.

"But how can you resign these pleasures so easily?" asked Miss Esdaile: "is it no sacrifice to you?"

"Oh, Miss Esdaile!" answered Marian, "if you had but my *motives*, you would perceive how trifling is the sacrifice. And even were it more difficult to obey the commands of God in this instance, I am assured that He who enables me now to fulfil them, would strengthen me if the sacrifice were greater, and the temptation more strong. If you thought as I do, you would agree with me, that if I hesitated to give up my own will to that of my Saviour, I should have no claim to the name of Christian."

Miss Esdaile changed colour, but she did not reply; and quitting the room very shortly, she retired to her own apartment, where she remained alone more than an hour.

In the evening of that day, Lady Esdaile and her daughter had a long, and as it seemed, an interesting conversation, for the traces of their agitation remained when they returned into the drawing-room. And that same evening Lady Esdaile informed Mrs. Ashford, with many professions of obligation for her kind hospitality, that circumstances had occurred which rendered their return home indispensable; and resisting all entreaties to remain, she returned into the country a day or two after, accompanied by her daughter; who, though she wept much on bidding farewell to Marian, looked happier than she had seemed during the whole period of her residence in London.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth!"

EARLY in the month of August Mrs. Ashford received an earnest invitation from Lady Esdaile and her daughter, to spend a few weeks with them; and as she was particularly fond of visiting Esdaile Park, she was very much disposed to accept it. But before she could do this, there was one great difficulty to be obviated. Marian was expressly excluded from the invitation, and Mrs. Ashford thought it would be unkind to leave her, while yet it was impossible that she could accompany her on this visit. Marian herself, however, was the first to remove this obstacle.

Mrs. Ashford permitted her to read the passage in Lady Esdaile's letter which related to herself, partly because she thought it would be a reproof to her, and in the second place, because it was an indirect way of acquainting her with the invitation. Marian perused it with surprise and pleasure, quite unmixed with any feelings of vexation.

"In this invitation, my dear Mrs. Ashford, I regret that I cannot include your niece; but Miss Ormiston's example, or her conversation, has unfortunately had such an injurious effect on Matilda's character, that I must trust to your considerate kindness to excuse this omission. The lamentable tendency to the new religion which is every day gaining so much ground, has unhappily been increased since Matilda's intercourse with Miss Ormiston, and I have no longer any power to restrain her from 'following the dictates of her conscience,' (the excuse of this new sect for

disobedience of every description;) though, to do her justice, her conduct towards me in every other respect is most exemplary. Do come to us soon: perhaps your arguments may have more weight with your friend than mine; though I fear, alas! she is quite irreclaimable."

Marian had the prudence to refrain from expressing her joy at these unexpected tidings of Miss Esdaile; but she begged that her aunt would not deny herself the pleasure of visiting her friend, and she added: "I received last month an invitation to Ladyston, but I did not mention it to you, because I thought you would be unwilling that I should go: now, however, you will perhaps allow me to accept it."

Mrs. Ashford hesitated between her own wishes, and her anxiety to prevent Marian from having any further intercourse with Mr. and Mrs. Claverton; but at length *self* obtained the victory, and it was decided, that on the same day Mrs. Ashford

should go to Esdaile Park, and Marian to the vicarage at Ladyston.

Once more an inmate in the house of Mr. Claverton, Marian was one of the happiest beings in existence. She was fulfilling her mother's wish; she had learned the meaning of her mother's anxieties; she knew and loved the religion which had given her mother peace. She often turned, in her occasionally solitary rambles, towards the cottage which had been their home, their happy home; but she regarded it without any bitter feelings, though not without a sorrowful regret; and when sometimes her heart suggested to her, "Oh! if my mother had lived till now!" she checked the rising murmur before it had escaped her lips, and instead of repining at the will of God, she said: "Why should I wish her to have remained with me, when He who has given me such friends, who is Himself a friend to me, has in his providence called her into his immediate pre-

sence? ‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ And I, I have only to follow Him, my Saviour, as she followed him, and he will redeem me from destruction, and give to me also the blessedness which he has purchased so dearly!”

Marian constantly corresponded with her aunt while Mrs. Ashford was at Esdaile Park, and from her letters she was apprised of Miss Esdaile’s now consistent conduct, and of the share which she herself had in occasioning the change. Mrs. Ashford wrote of it in terms of the most heartfelt regret; but Marian read her letters with feelings, oh, how different! for she rejoiced for her sake, that Miss Esdaile was learning to glorify God her Saviour, and she was grateful on her own account, that her heavenly Master had already given to her the influence of example, and rendered it beneficial to another. She trusted that it was an omen of her future usefulness, and she had many bright thoughts of

the future good of which she might be the instrument, and of the happiness which she herself should enjoy in making others happy.

" You will not refuse *your* assent, dear Mrs. Claverton," said she, one evening, approaching her with two open letters in her hand: " remember, you promised I should reside with you if I chose."

The vicar and Mrs. Claverton looked in her joyous and glowing face, which yet betrayed the traces of tears, with pleased surprise, and gave her the answer she required.

" This morning," said Marian, " I received a letter from my aunt: she tells me she is returning home, and requests that I will be there to meet her, and to spend another happy winter with her. But as I have long since decided that my dear mother's choice was the best, and as my own judgment and inclination are now on the side of her wishes, I am anxious to inform

my aunt of the residence which I have chosen; and to spare myself the pain of refusing to accede to her request, (for she is anxious that I should continue with her,) I have written to apprise her of my determination."

She gave the letter to Mr. Claverton, and he immediately read it.

"LADYSTON VICARAGE,
Sept. 23, 1819.

"MY DEAR AUNT,

"IF you knew the reluctance I feel to acquaint you with a determination which I know will give you pain, I think it would, in some degree, lessen the displeasure with which I am afraid this letter will cause you to regard me. Believe me, the wish to reside with Mr. and Mrs. Claverton arises from no want of affection for you, nor from the absence of a grateful consciousness of your kindness: you have

indeed been very kind to me, my dear aunt; and if I seem to repay it but coldly by desiring to leave you, attribute it not to ingratitude, but to the conviction that it is a duty which I am bound to fulfil.

“ I need not tell you of the change which my inclinations and my thoughts have experinced since the death of my mother; a change which she herself desired, and prayed for, and anticipated. Nor need I say that, thinking as I do, there must necessarily be much that is contrary to my principles in the house of a person of different opinions; there must necessarily be many enticements to act blameably—perhaps I should say, sinfully; and as I can only pray to be delivered from temptation and from evil while I am myself watchful to avoid it, surely you will not blame me, if, doubting myself, feeling my own weakness, and dreading above all things to sin against God, I am anxious to remain at

Ladyston, where I shall be encouraged to resist every thing which is opposed to His will, and be taught to fear him, as I believe that he must be feared.

“ Forgive me, my dearest aunt, if there is any thing in this letter that displeases you. Do not doubt my sincerity, when I tell you that I still love you—that I shall be happy to visit you at any, or at all times that you are kind enough to wish for me—and that, as you will always have a claim to, so you will always possess, the gratitude and the affection of the niece to whom you have been as a parent. My uncle, my cousins—not one is forgotten by me; but, though I think it my duty, and I confess it is my wish, to reside in a family whose sentiments are more in accordance with my own, the friends whom I have left in London will always be dear to me.

“ Adieu, my dear aunt! Write to me soon, and tell me you forgive me; and

do not suspect that I shall ever cease to be

“Your affectionate and grateful

“MARIAN ORMISTON.”

After having been assured of the approval of the vicar and Mrs. Claverton, Marian herself carried the letter to the village post-office, and then crossing over some fields, she intended to take a long and solitary walk. But she passed through the church-yard, a quiet and retired spot, shut out from the little village world by the tall and leafy trees which surrounded it. Here was the grave of her mother; and having just performed the last anxious wish of her buried parent, Marian approached it with a sad yet happy heart. Once more leaning over the grassy mound, she gazed on the name that she had so often looked upon with sorrow and despair;

the tears, not of grief, but of hope and peace, shone in her earnest eye, and she exclaimed, in a subdued and a confiding voice: “Yes, my mother, we *shall* meet again! ours will not be an eternal nor a long farewell. Our Saviour has ransomed us, he will give us his happiness, and our meeting will soon be in the paradise of God!”

THE END.

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